

# MY FRUITFUL OFFERING

By  
Robert Elliot

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ALTHOUGH she was perhaps not quite so refined as I could wish, yet I was really greatly attracted toward Johanna, and as Christmas was near, in fact only a week distant, I thought I would indicate the state of my feelings by making her an offering.

Not too expensive an offering, you understand, for that might make her incline toward me for my means, which are not small. I have an excellent position in Gore & Bludgeon's and am in receipt of an income of nine hundred and fifty dollars per annum, with the promise of the other fifty after Christmas.

Pretty good I consider this for a self-made man of twenty-eight; and it certainly gives me a solid financial status among my fellows.

I considered, then, that my offering to Johanna must not be of too small a character, else she might think me a niggard. I never made her a present except upon one occasion, when I purchased for her some excellent candies, which she rather tactlessly, I thought, objected were not in a box. Of course, they won't box candies in New York that are under fifteen cents a pound.

But woman! Wondrous woman! We men must bear with their little foibles. After consulting several columns of bargain-sale advertisements in the papers, which the different men in our office kindly allowed me to peruse, I decided it would be indicative for a gentleman to offer a lady the articles chiefly mentioned therein.

I decided to visit my maternal grandmother and hear her views on the subject.

I have no other living relative, and my grandmother, Mrs. Captain Hubbell, is a very fine woman, wonderfully intelligent for eighty-nine—and a perfect lady most of the time.

It was on a Tuesday that I first considered the advisability of laying an offering before Johanna; and that very evening, for I am a man of prompt action, I sallied forth.

Arriving at the grocery store over which my grandmother resides, I entered and went upstairs. Hearing voices, I paused outside the door. The old lady was speaking: "Hubbell and trouble! Seems I got both when I got him! Captain indeed! Tell that to the matins! Nettie, go and tell that to the marines, I say!"

"Hush, Mrs. Hubbell," said a female voice—a sweet voice, too, it was. "Don't excite yourself; I'll tell them."

"Tell them now, then, you little hussy; go and tell the marines about Hubbell or I'll scream."

The old lady's voice rose to an alarmingly high pitch. Quickly the door was flung open and there almost fell into my arms a really very pretty girl.

"Oh! excuse me," she said as I stepped into the

couldn't tell her size in one thing how could I in another? Woman! Woman! always inconsistent. I then thought of a cuckoo clock, a canary, or pepper and salt shakers.

Nettie said she thought handkerchiefs would be nice or an umbrella, but these I triumphantly pointed out to her were even less romantic than my teapot, for sipping tea together often leads to sentimental wanderings of the mind.

Nettie was really most sympathetic and interested. "How happy she will be to receive anything from you, sir!" she exclaimed at last.

She had very fine eyes, not exactly green, and not exactly brown, but hazel, I fancy; and though I have heard this color called deceitful, I felt she could be trusted as she uttered these highly proper and pleasing sentiments.

"I wish," she continued, "I knew a man, a really fine, honorable gentleman, who would ever think like that for me." She sighed and I saw the good little thing was lonely; she could not have been more than twenty years old, and I understood what a treat it must be to talk with a person of intelligence; so I stayed pretty late.

Before I took my leave we arranged that as my grandmother slept from three until six o'clock every afternoon, I would call for Miss Nettie on the following Saturday and we would go together and choose my present for Johanna.

I slipped out without waking my aged relative and

One rude young salesman said to me, just because I asked him, very politely, too, the price of a sword with scabbard and hilt richly encrusted with jewels, "Just one hundred times more than you can lay your hands on without being arrested." But I crushed the young upstart, for, turning majestically to Nettie, I said: "Countess, I must apologize for the manners of this person. We will proceed to Tiffany's and place no further orders with this firm."

The young man looked dumfounded, and as we entered the elevator to descend, I saw him in great agitation pointing us out to another clerk and beating his brow with his forehead.

I do not think he will ever again insult a stranger. Nettie had a bad attack of neuralgia after this. I was greatly annoyed for fear my offering should not after all be purchased that day; and I wondered how bearing the inscription "Hot Soda," and I asked her, in the excitement of the moment, whether she would quaff a glass with me; for it was a cold day, though bright, and after the heat in the stores the wind was nipping.

She accepted a little too eagerly, I thought: women should be careful about accepting beverages at the hands of the male sex. However, Nettie is young and thoughtless.

We entered the store, therefore, and I asked how much the soda was; the clerk (who it appeared was a friend of Nettie's) told us it was ten cents a glass.



I HAUGHTILY LAID A DIME UPON THE COUNTER AND SAYING, "I DO NOT CARE FOR SODA," TURNED AWAY.

went home, quite pleased with my evening, having enjoyed myself surprisingly and not having spent any money at all.

Nettie is much smaller than Johanna. Saturday arrived, and during the whole of the morning I was possessed of a strange impatience.

Usually I enjoy the work with which I am intrusted, and although I am not by any means familiar with the other young men in our firm's employ, still I can often correct mistakes for them, and I feel that I have the confidence of the heads themselves. On Thursday Mr. Gore said to me: "Stick to it, Mr. Grappler, and don't eat too much lunch; it muddles the intellect, you know." Which showed a friendly interest, I thought, for he only nodded to the other fellows. And Mr. Bludgeon the following day addressed me as "Grappler." It is very gratifying to me to be so Bong Comedrade, as it were, with the men in whose employ I am.

On Saturday things did not seem to go as they should. I had on my best suit and a pale blue tie (I am very fair), which my maternal grandmother had given me, being one of the deceased Captain's which he had never worn. While eating my lunch a clumsy clerk stumbled against me and a piece of lemon pie, which I was in the act of biting, fell on my trousers and stained them badly. I was much annoyed, and on expostulating with the youth he called me a curious name. I was uncertain of his meaning, which I think was offensive, so pretended I had not heard the remark.

My books would not balance; and I really despaired of getting my little shopping expedition with Miss Nettie when a young fellow came up to me and said: "Here, old mole, are you going out with your steady that you are dressed so regardless? I'll finish up your job if you want me to." I disliked his style of speech, but I had always liked him—and once, rather weakly I fear, I lent him ten dollars, because his sister was sick and he needed delicacies for her. I may also mention that he paid me back like a gentleman—so I disregarded his want of manner and admitted that I had a little appointment. Then Curly (all the office called him that) said, "Pull up stakes, and make tracks to find your consort." So taking that to mean I might as well leave immediately, I showed him my difficulty, thanked him and left.

This was a thing I should never have dreamed of doing before. Strange that buying a present for Johanna should interest me so deeply!

On reaching the grocery store over which my grandmother resides, I found Miss Nettie awaiting me. She really looked charming in a blue peignoir, I think the ladies call it, which made her appear very neat and trim; I complimented her upon it and she admired my tie, and said it matched my eyes. I was much gratified. "Your eyes are such a nice, watery blue," she added.

I was rather annoyed. "They are a little weak," I said, "but they only water if there is a high wind." She explained that she meant the color of blue water. It is a pity not to cultivate the art of expressing oneself correctly; I was rather embarrassed at having spoken sharply.

The streets were thronged with people. It was so near Christmas that the store windows were all gayly decorated—some beautifully with large Christmas trees, and many had quaint acts of Santa Claus portrayed.

In one big department store was an airship, composed entirely of white handkerchiefs, and at the steering wheel sat Santa Claus, while the whole car was heaped with toys and pretty things.

Nettie and I were greatly diverted. Pleasantly conversing, we roamed about, looking at the beautiful wares offered for sale, and inquiring the price of everything.

I jocosely remarked, "Two for fifteen, I suppose," but being quite devoid of both business instinct and humor, he crossly replied, "No, ten cents straight—put up or shut up."

I haughtily laid a dime upon the counter and saying, "I do not care for soda," turned away. Nettie took her, and the very offensive young clerk engaged her in conversation, which I was glad to see she responded to but briefly. When we were leaving he pressed a large bottle of perfume upon her and advised her to try another sample of the genus homo. When I asked him if they were free, he laughed and said: "Yes, some are too free, and others not nearly free enough."

When we got outside Nettie inquired suddenly, "Mr. Grappler, did you ever knock a man down?" I was surprised; but one must expect strange remarks from women, so I replied soothingly, "No, Miss Nettie, I do not believe that I ever did."

"Well, I would begin if I were you," she said. I was amused at the fierceness of the little thing. "No," I said soothingly. "If I lose my temper I put myself in the wrong; if I do not, the other man is in the wrong."

"But," she said, "they must think you so spiritless if they insult you and you do not resent it." "What they think or say makes very little difference to me, but what you think would mean a great deal, Nettie," I said.

I was very much surprised at having given utterance to this sentiment; and when in answer she smiled very sweetly and said, "Thank you, Mr. Grappler," I felt quite pleased. I would drop in some drug store later on and ask for a free sample of that genus homo, to send as a little Christmas remembrance.

I really like that girl Nettie. It was beginning to grow dark and a light snow was falling. I was cold, having no overcoat; and Nettie said Mrs. Hubbell would be angry if she stayed out too long. So exclaiming sadly, "Vain is our quest!"—which I thought was rather a neat phrase—I happened to glance toward a window we were passing and I beheld a beautiful work of art.

It was the representation of a dish of fruit; the apples and bananas were most realistic, and the grapes on top, although rather massed, were really fine.

The piece was made of plaster of paris, colored, and I felt sure Johanna could not fail to be grateful.

"Come," I said to Nettie, "this is what I seek." Women are really very curious. She answered, "Do you go to the theatre a great deal?"

To follow a lady's train of thought one would have to possess a mind like a bounding antelope and a pig tied by the legs; but though lacking in these characteristics still I am seldom at a loss for an answer, so I replied:

"It is the only form of entertainment I indulge in. I go only to tragedies—no frivolous vulgarities for me; but why do you inquire?"

She laughed. "You speak as if you were one of the heroes in a tragedy—or a villain," she said, and her hazel eyes shone straight into mine.

Little Nettie is pretty, and it is really a very strange fact that lovely woman can treat us strong men as though we were weaklings. I suppose that is why I did not resent her remark, but just saying carelessly, "The eloquence of my dictation has been remarked upon more than once," I held open the door of the store and we passed in.

The woman who waited upon us was an Italian, and showed us quite a number of pretty things in plaster. There was an angel's head with outspread wings which Nettie admired. I thought it looked rather as if recovering from the mumps; but she said it would be a lovely present for Johanna—suggesting delicately to her that she was an angel; but I liked the fruit piece. And finding it was only one dollar and the angel two, I purchased the fruit.

As the parcel was being wrapped up, Nettie whispered to me, "Beat her down." I was bewildered and looked around to see if I was about to be attacked. You can never trust foreigners. Then at struck me as I left the store with the parcel that perhaps Nettie referred to the price. I stopped instantly.

"Do you think I could have got it for less?" I asked her. Nettie laughed. "Come," she said: "It is too late now, but fifty cents is all you should have paid."

I was greatly crestfallen, and tore a little bit of the paper off my purchase to again appraise its value. As I walked moodily along, a loud laugh assailed my ears, and I suddenly received a slap on the back which knocked my hat over my eyes. Turning, I beheld Johanna, with her headgear tipped away off her head and her hands in the pocket of a big, loose coat which she wore.

"Never touched him," said she; then turning to a big, dark man who accompanied her, "Mr. Thompson, this is Mr. Grappler."

I bowed and presented Nettie to them. Mr. Thompson immediately went round to Nettie's side and began paying her expansive compliments and gazing into her eyes. I tried to distract her attention; but she walked on with him, and left me to follow with Johanna.

We were just opposite Sherry's when Johanna stopped.

"Hie, Thompson," she called. "Grappler is going to treat the crowd. I tried to stop him, but he is so free-handed—come on."

"Really, Miss Johanna," I said, "I have neither the time nor the money to spend. I regret that I must hurry home. I have been shopping, and have spent all my spare coin."

Johanna looked at Thompson as he bent over Nettie and a wicked gleam came into her eyes. She glanced at the parcel in my hand, and then, snatching it from me, she uncovered the remainder of the pretty thing that I had bought—for her.

With a coarse laugh she held it up. "Somebody is going to get their deserts. Whoever could buy such a hopeless horror as that must be a mean guy, and—gazing meaningly at Nettie—"I don't admire his taste."

Nettie looked at her for a moment, then, taking the despised curio from her hand, she said, "Mr. Grappler, it is late; will you carry my purchase for me again and see me safely home?"

Bowing to Mr. Thompson, she turned to cross the street; and as I followed her I heard the quick foot of an automobile.

I stopped, but Nettie evidently did not hear, for before I could detain her she had stepped quickly onto the road, while at the same instant the glare of a big headlight fell upon her.

Instantly I stooped, laid down my fruit and dashing forth seized Nettie by the dress and pulled her violently back, but my foot slipped, I staggered and fell. The next moment I felt something crushing my arm. I heard a wild scream from Johanna, and everything grew dark.

I am writing this lying in the hospital, with my left arm broken in two places and a deep cut in my head.

I am better, though, and hope soon to be out and back at my office, as our firm will miss me. I know. Fortunately, my right hand is uninjured. I have written this to amuse myself during the long hours; and I must say that it is really very interesting.

I have always felt a leaning toward literature; but so many people write who have no value to the world in other ways that a man of ability may well feel he is but trifling when he wanders in ink.



I suffer a great deal of pain; but my head is clear. The nurses are very kind to me. To-morrow will be Christmas day.

They tell me Nettie was unhurt, for which I am very thankful.

What a Christmas this has been for me! Mr. Gore came himself in the morning and said not to worry about my enforced absence from the office, that he and Mr. Bludgeon had decided that a man of my conscientious abilities deserved reward, and I should henceforth be manager of the department in which I work, at a salary of two thousand dollars a year!

I am mortified to remember that, though usually so eloquent, words failed me at this critical moment, and I only said:

"I cannot thank you and Mr. Bludgeon enough, sir." "Merry Christmas, Grappler," went out.

Then came "Curly" from our office, and he told me, to my great surprise, that the sister for whose comforts I had lent him the ten dollars was no other than Nettie!

Curly said a great many kind things to me. He told me I was the hero of our office, and that they had clubbed together and sent me a Christmas present. He told me that they all found their work was harder for the want of the few little services I was wont to render them, and they asked me to accept a fur-lined overcoat.

I suppose the weakness that followed my little accident was the cause of my almost shedding tears when he told me that every one in our big office, from the heads to the little messenger boy, contributed toward my gift.

When he left I examined the magnificent garment and was quite overcome with emotion. After that the nurse entered with a parcel, saying, with a smile, as she handed it to me, "You seem very popular, Mr. Grappler."



On unwrapping my package I found it contained a handsome green plush album for photographs, with a portrait of Johanna in the front and in very large handwriting was inscribed the words, "From Johanna to Her Hero."

I was rather embarrassed by this mark of attention, for somehow I seemed to have gone off Johanna, so to speak.

The ornamental fruit which I had bought as a present for her had been sent to the hospital the day after the accident, quite uninjured, and I decided to send it to Nettie.

Just as I had got the nurse to neatly wrap and address it, and had arranged with myself to procure the mummy cherup she so much admired as a New Year's gift for her, she entered—little Nettie, looking so sweet and rosy-cheeked that I forgot everything but her.

She advanced timidly. "What can I do, give or say to thank you?"

Then it was that I rose to the supreme heights. Over on the stage have I seen a more dramatic situation than would have been presented to an onlooker at that time, if any had been present.

"Antoinette," I exclaimed, "give me your heart and hand, not in payment, dear, but as a Christmas gift. Antoinette, I love you!"

She dropped on her knees beside my bed; and then she told me shyly and sweetly that she had always been interested in me since her brother told her of the loan I made him. She had always known I was a favorite at our office, and when she met me she liked me, but—here she hid her face—"what of Johanna?"

"Oh, woman! Capricious, loving, lovely woman! 'Forget Johanna,' I said, 'as I have. What kind of ring will I get you, Nettie?'"

"Would you believe it, the thoughtless girl answered, 'I like pearls and diamonds.'"

I was amazed, but women are all like squaws, ever eager to bedeck themselves with shining beads and tails of animals, and feathers for their hair.

Then Nettie produced a parcel. "This is for you. I know you like the imitation, so I hope these also will please you," she said.

I thought her sentiments well expressed. Thanking her I opened the gift, and discovered big purple grapes, apples and bananas, an exact duplicate of my fruit piece.

I was delighted, although very much surprised at Nettie spending so much money, and then I triumphantly handed her my offering.

When she received it she tried to thank me, but a bad attack of neuralgia came on.

I put my uninjured arm around her. "I certainly do think I love you, Horatio," she said, and laughed right in my face.

I do not think I altogether understand women; but I like them just as well as I did.

I found the foregoing in a memorandum book of mine to-day. It was written just three years ago; and a month later, with my arm still in a sling, I married my little Nettie.

Our firm has raised my salary every year. Fortune smiles upon us, and we are very happy.

I seem to have changed somewhat lately, for I like comedies now; and this Christmas I gave my wife a seakink sack. I fear that was rather extravagant on my part, though Nettie thinks otherwise.

Nettie says she was never more pleased in her life than when she heard me say after the Christmas dinner yesterday that I was "satisfied up to where Mary tied the beads!" I was rather ashamed of myself—I learned that remark from Curly, I suppose.

Neither do I seem to admire that fruit piece much now. I wanted to remove it from our sideboard; but Nettie said, "No, dear, let it stay, it shows I really loved you."

I should have thought it showed I loved her; but woman! woman! who can fathom the strange sayings that emanate from their fair lips!

I asked Nettie about that sample of the genus homo of which the reading of my interesting little memoirs reminded me.

I am sorry to say she had a slight touch of her old enemy, from which she seldom suffers nowadays; when she recovered she uttered these enigmatic words, "I got a sample for myself soon after that, Horatio. I liked it well, and want no other."

Then she kissed me. "Thou art the man," she said. Now I wonder what she meant.



Next Week,

Enmeshed In A Hank Of Hair

By  
Forrest Halsey